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## TOWARDS A HOLISTIC VISION OF EDUCATION: OUTCOMES OF THE MAJOR GLOBAL EDUCATION CONFERENCES 2008-2009

### OUTLINE

In accordance with resolutions adopted by the 34th session of the General Conference (34 C/Resolutions 4, 6, 15 and 19), UNESCO is holding four global education conferences during this biennium.

This document highlights the major outcomes of the three conferences that have already taken place and the Eighth Meeting of the High-Level Group on Education for All (EFA). It focuses on the common threads running through and synergies between these conferences, whose main goal was to increase understanding of how education – when its policies are guided by a holistic vision of education systems and aim to ensure equitable access to EFA – can help address the key challenges of today's world and prepare for a sustainable future.

To the extent possible, this analysis includes the extensive preparatory work undertaken for the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI), which has been postponed from May to December 2009.

1. At its 34th session, the General Conference requested UNESCO to organize four major education conferences in 2008-2009:<sup>1</sup>

- the Forty-eighth International Conference on Education: “Inclusive Education: the Way of the Future” (25-28 November, 2008, Geneva, Switzerland);
- the World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development: “Moving into the Second Half of the United Nations Decade” (31 March-2 April 2009, Bonn, Germany);
- the 2009 World Conference on Higher Education: “The New Dynamics of Higher Education and Research for Societal Change and Development” (5-8 July 2009, Paris, France); and
- the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education [CONFINTEA VI]: “Learning and Living for a Viable Future: the Power of Adult Learning”, which has been postponed from May to 1-4 December, 2009 (Belém, Brazil).<sup>2</sup>

In addition, the Eighth Meeting of the High-Level Group on EFA: “Acting together” was held from 16 to 18 December 2008 (Oslo, Norway).

2. These events brought together participants representing UNESCO Member States and Associate Members, including Ministers and Vice-Ministers of Education, United Nations agencies, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, the private sector, universities and research institutions, experts, teachers, students and learners. “Social partners” will also participate in CONFINTEA VI.

3. In preparation for the world conferences, over 30 regional and subregional conferences, meetings and workshops have been convened since 2007. They have aimed to reach consensus on the strategic areas for discussion and action, and to identify key issues and relevant challenges in the different regions as well as regional strategies and recommendations for presentation at the global events.

4. The conference cycle as a whole, and each individual regional and global conference, has been viewed by UNESCO as a unique opportunity to reaffirm that education is a right, a foundation for sustainable human development and a significant factor in improving human well-being. It has also been the occasion to emphasize that poverty cannot be alleviated without education. Furthermore, individual conferences offered opportunities for giving new direction and impetus to education reforms aimed at improving equity, inclusion, quality and innovation, as well as underscoring the need for successful learning outcomes for all.

5. In particular, the conferences were an opportunity to: reaffirm the role played by education in providing people with capacities and skills so that they might better exercise their responsibility towards others and the world; reflect on content, pedagogical methods and delivery for learners of

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<sup>1</sup> In particular:

- Resolution 4, paragraph 1. (v) concerning the organization of the 48th Session of the International Conference on Education (ICE) on the theme “Inclusive Education: the way of the future”;
- Resolution 6, paragraph 1 (d) and (e) concerning the preparation and organization of the Sixth International Conference on Adult education (CONFINTEA VI) in Brazil in 2009;
- Resolution 15 concerning the preparation and organization of a World Conference on Higher Education in 2009, and
- Resolution 19 concerning the further promotion of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), including the hosting and financing, by Germany, of a 2009 mid-term review conference.

<sup>2</sup> From 22-24 September 2010, a World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education will be organized by UNESCO, the City Government of Moscow and the Federal Government of the Russian Federation.

all ages and walks of life; and provide a common vision for education policy that can guide Member States in adapting their education systems to today's social, economic and human needs.

## **I. Background**

6. An innovative society prepares its people not only to embrace and adapt to change, but also to manage and influence it. As societies are faced with rapid change and becoming more integrated and knowledge-intensive, a premium is placed on the ability of citizens to think critically, solve problems, respect diversity and support sustainable living. The remaining challenge for countries in this period of economic and financial crisis is to maintain relevance and quality in the formal education and skills sector, with lifelong learning for all also becoming a guiding and organizing principle of education reforms. There are no simple solutions to these challenges. However, one statement from the "Delors report"<sup>3</sup> can be held up as a mirror for assessing education: "Choosing a type of education means choosing a type of society."

## **II. Principal outcomes**

7. Discussions during each of the conferences focused on concern for the impact of the economic and financial crisis, in particular on the most vulnerable populations and on education budgets and systems. Participants underlined the central role of education for development and change towards more equitable, just and peaceful societies. They also reaffirmed their commitment to education as a public good and to the internationally agreed development goals, including the Education for All (EFA) agenda and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

8. In a lifelong learning approach, all levels, segments and modalities of education are needed in order to achieve EFA and fulfil the right of all to education: early childhood care and education (ECCE); formal primary and secondary education; technical and vocational education and training; higher education; adult education and learning; and non-formal and informal education opportunities, with literacy as the foundation for all further learning.

9. The conferences underlined the key role that States and governments must play in their leadership, legislative and regulatory roles in order to ensure equity, relevance and quality at all levels and modalities of the education system while guaranteeing academic freedom. However, governments cannot and must not achieve this alone. Rather, they should involve all other education stakeholders. Partnerships with civil society, the corporate sector and the media are important means for enhancing access to, and the quality of, education. The participation of learners and students, of young people and adults, of their families (and not just "parents") and communities, as well as of teachers and educators in education governance, was considered essential to increasing relevance and quality.

10. For education to be relevant, it is also important to make use of existing and traditional knowledge as well as local materials and resources.

11. All of the EFA goals are connected, and should be viewed within a broader education and development context. The international community must strive to ensure that education systems encourage equity and inclusion, quality learning, flexibility and innovation – the foundations for providing global education for all. There is a need for interdisciplinary approaches and cooperation across sectors and departments within governments, education and research institutions, and national and international organizations, including UNESCO. Education cannot be treated in isolation. Rather, it must be addressed in relation to health, social conditions, labour, economics and gender, among other issues.

12. Inclusion is not synonymous with access. A broadened concept of inclusion that involves successful participation, learning and completion through addressing the diverse needs of all

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<sup>3</sup> *Learning: The Treasure Within*, UNESCO, 1996.

learners must be recognized. This includes concerns for the welfare of learners and students, calls for support for poor and marginalized populations, and the development of activities that ensure that learning is relevant to personal, social and economic needs.

13. Each of the conferences emphasized the need to enhance learning opportunities for all people throughout their lives through different channels and delivery modes. They called for increased attention to non-formal and informal education, noting the need for pathways allowing people to move in and out of formal systems at various stages and the recognition of diverse learning achievements and work experiences.

14. Policy-makers were urged to make equity a priority in education. The development of education interventions targeting low-performing regions, schools and individuals was encouraged, with a focus on innovative strategies to reach the most disadvantaged groups.

15. The strong impact of information and communication technologies, including the “traditional” media (radio, press and television), was highlighted given their great potential to improve access to, and the quality of, education around the world.

16. Since merely expanding access to educational opportunities does not necessarily translate into guaranteeing the right to learn, governments must be concerned with assessing or measuring learning outcomes, developing indicators and monitoring systems in order to improve the quality of education. The conferences highlighted the need for better data and scientific research as a prerequisite to the development of evidence-based policies to improve quality, retention and success. This data should be on both education systems and on learners, including “potential” learners who are excluded or not enrolled. Obtaining better data and research findings also requires more attention to teaching and learning practices, as well as to the teachers themselves.

17. As such, the “Oslo Declaration” (Eighth meeting of the High-Level Group on EFA, December 2008) endorsed the creation of the International Task Force on “Teachers for EFA”, a voluntary global alliance of EFA partners working together to address the “teacher gap”. Addressing the remaining challenges associated with reducing this gap is of particular importance if we are to achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 2015.

18. Each of the conferences emphasized the social responsibility of higher education and research in advancing knowledge and understanding that can contribute to active citizenship, to solving current issues and to supporting humanity’s ability to face present and future challenges. There is a strong expectation that the higher education and research sector will respond to and anticipate society’s, and the education sector’s, need for scientific excellence, knowledge development and innovation. The participation of higher education institutions in research is also crucial for achieving the MDGs. Higher education has an essential contribution to make to EFA by training teachers, planners, administrators and principals, by improving pedagogy and resource materials, and by developing relevant curricula.

19. UNESCO has been called upon to promote education as a key factor for sustainable development in various United Nations and other international contexts (such as the forthcoming United Nations Climate Change Conference – Copenhagen, 6-18 December 2009 – and the meetings of the G8 and G20), and to relate it to each of the Organization’s areas of competence.

20. UNESCO also has a key role to play with regard to international cooperation and the exchange of good policies and practices, based on the principles of mutual respect and solidarity, and including South-South and triangular North-South-South cooperation.

21. Finally, the various conferences insisted on the importance of education in the transmission of values, in inducing behaviour change, in teaching ethics as well as knowledge and skills, and in constructing the capacity of learners to think and to continue learning. The crucial importance for education systems to develop and foster active responsibility, solidarity and sharing, global

citizenship and the capacity to adapt, create, innovate, recognize and respect the value of diversity, is a thread that runs through the debates and documents of the different education meetings and conferences. Undoubtedly, UNESCO has a major role to play in their follow-up, which must be reflected in the Organization's programme and budget for the next biennium.

## **Annex**

For further information, please consult the following websites:

- Conclusions and Recommendations of the 48th session of the ICE

<http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/ice/48th-session-2008/conclusions-and-recommendations.html>

- Bonn Declaration

[http://www.esd-world-conference-2009.org/fileadmin/download/ESD2009\\_BonnDeclaration080409.pdf](http://www.esd-world-conference-2009.org/fileadmin/download/ESD2009_BonnDeclaration080409.pdf)

- Communiqué of the WCHE

[http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/ED/pdf/WCHE\\_2009/FINAL%20COMMUNIQUE%20WCHE%202009.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/ED/pdf/WCHE_2009/FINAL%20COMMUNIQUE%20WCHE%202009.pdf)

- Oslo Declaration

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0017/001794/179421e.pdf>

- CONFINTEA VI Website

<http://www.unesco.org/en/confinteavi/>